

The Asia Foundation
Strengthening Advocacy and Local Government Accountability
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PROGRESS REPORT
April - June 2002

Summary of Program Activities in Current Reporting Period:

- **Curriculum development**
- **Change in partnership structure**
- **Project Steering Committee meetings**
- **Preliminary survey**
- **Selection and training of master trainers**
- **Training for lead group members**
- **Field visits**
- **Baseline survey**

Curriculum development

Both Pro Public and INSEC finalized curricula in June following a series of joint consultation meetings with the Foundation.

The Pro Public curriculum comprises a master trainers' manual and a resource book for use by forest and water users groups. To meet project objectives, the contents are divided into four sections. The first section provides background information for forest and water users: overview of rules and regulations relating to forest and water, introduction of key information on natural resources in Nepal, users' roles in local development, and introduction to the respective national federations of forest and water users groups. The second section deals with good governance and advocacy. The four so-called pillars of democracy, namely, citizen participation, transparency, accountability, and rule of law are discussed at some length in this section. The third section addresses the building of capacity of participants in order to make them more effective citizens. The final section provides information on ways and means to help users groups develop linkages and partnerships at local and national levels.

The INSEC curriculum also has a master trainers' manual and a resource book for the use of emerging networks of women from USAID's Women's Empowerment Program (WEP). The curriculum builds on WEP, which calls for strengthening women's networks and building alliances for improved local government accountability. INSEC's curriculum has four sections, on general information on rights, development and participation; women's status and rights; action-oriented information on citizen advocacy, budget analysis, and monitoring of government performance; and conflict resolution.

Change in partnership structure

Forest Action was added as a third NGO partner to the team of implementing partners, with a view to provide qualitative inputs to the project. Contracted in early April, this new partner will help build capacity in self-monitoring and learning, document best practices, and strengthen implementation of select activities. Forest Action will also be responsible for review and revision of training materials

developed by Pro Public and INSEC to ensure quality and consistency, and for facilitation and adaptation of fresh tools for increasing citizen participation in addressing local-level problems and strengthening government accountability.

Project Steering Committee (PSC) meetings

Three PSC meetings were held during the reporting period. The first PSC meeting in April was to announce inclusion of a new partner—Forest Action—in the project and to clarify its roles and responsibilities. The second PSC meeting, held in May, stressed improved coordination among partners; finalized a joint action plan and specific implementation schedule for partners; and provided a collaborative plan specifically for the baseline survey and for self-monitoring mechanisms. The challenges with curriculum development were also jointly discussed. The third PSC meeting was held in early June, and was devoted to a joint reflection of partners' activities in the previous months. Following their first field-level project observation visit, Forest Action provided detailed suggestions and recommendations for Pro Public and INSEC. The observations mainly covered the practicality of the curricula and aftermath of preliminary activities carried out by the partners. This PSC meeting also finalized the schedule for the first monthly coordination meeting at the field level.

Preliminary survey

Pro Public completed the preliminary survey in May to identify lead groups and VDCs. The survey served as a preliminary needs assessment of the lead groups, and assisted in finalization of the training curriculum. INSEC completed the survey for women's groups and VDCs in February.

Selection and Training of Master Trainers

In early April, INSEC conducted a seven-day training workshop for master trainers in Janakpur. The training was participatory and focused on content clarity and information building. Since most of the trainers were seasoned development trainers, new areas were identified to further improve the curriculum.

Pro Public selected and trained master trainers in May in Kathmandu. During the five-day training workshop, different resource persons were invited to clarify local and national policy and regulatory issues governing forest and water resources.

Training for Lead Group Members

Pro Public began lead group members' training in late June. The training for all lead group members will be completed by first week of July. INSEC will begin and complete training in July.

Field visits

Program staff of The Asia Foundation made two field visits during this reporting period. The first visit took place in April, to observe INSEC's training of master trainers and to visit Pro Public field offices. The Foundation made two recommendations during the visit: first, to call a PSC meeting to improve coordination between partners and, second, to revise curricula for improved consistency between the trainers' manual and the participant handbook. Some changes in lay out of contents were also suggested.

The second field visit took place in May, as a regular monitoring activity. During the visit, a series of interactions took place with district project staff of the NGO partners in order to assess readiness of project stakeholders to launch the program at lead group level. All project sites/districts were visited except Sarlahi, which could not be covered due to time constraints.

Baseline survey

Pro Public conducted the baseline survey in late June following a series of preparatory meetings with the Foundation and the other two partners. The main objective of the baseline is to provide for the Project Monitoring Plan (PMP).

At the end of this reporting period, INSEC had completed preparatory activities to conduct and complete the baseline survey in July.

Issues and challenges during the period:

Consultation meetings with FECOFUN and NFIUWAN

In June, joint meetings were organized with the national federations of forest and water users groups, with a view to incorporate their views in project activities and to improve coordination. The meetings resulted in firm commitments from the federations to assist Pro Public in project implementation and in national level workshops. They also appreciated Pro Public's intention to include representatives from their district chapters in the lead group training.